



MSU's Religious Studies Department Making Health a Focus in Course Offerings

By [LINDSEY ARGO \(/PEOPLE/LINDSEY-ARGO\)](#) • NOV 4, 2016

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An 18-month term grant is enabling Missouri State University to develop course offerings focused on religion and health.

Funding is being provided by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The idea of adding courses focused on religion and health came about since many students minoring in Religious Studies at MSU are majoring in health-related fields.

“So that got me to think, so what is it about our courses that are appealing to students in Health and Human Services?” asked Berkwitz.



Dr. Stephen Berkwitz is head of the Religious Studies Department at Missouri State. His realization led to a series of interviews to better understand the lay of the land.

“In March we interviewed some health professionals to ask about their experience, experiences dealing with religious issues in the workplace, and the focus groups and the interviews basically confirmed to us what we had suspected all along, that religion is really a very common issue that people in health-related fields need to deal with,” Berkwitz explains.

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Missouri State Department of Religious Studies Banner outside the department offices.

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In fact, this semester Religious Studies majors are the minority in the Religion, Spirituality, and Health course taught by Dr. John Schmalzbauer.

Berkwitz understands this project is not very common among Religious Studies Departments around the country, placing Missouri State at the head of the pack.

“I’m not aware of many Religious Studies programs that are doing the same kind of thing that we’re doing,” says Berkwitz.

New course development will continue through the duration of the grant, which expires in June 2017. This spring students can take Health and the Body in American Religions. They will also soon be able to apply for internships in this area.

“We’ll also be offering one perhaps two internships, one with Missouri Healthcare for All, and then I think we’re pretty far along in developing a second one that deals with caring for veterans,” tells Berkwitz.

MSU’s Department of Religious Studies has been working with the Health and Human Services Department on this project since early this year. Last week, Pamela Klassen, a professor and researcher from the University of Toronto, visited MSU and spoke with faculty and students about how religion in health should be addressed.

“Medicine, like religion, is what I am calling a technique of intervention in the lives of others,” explains Klassen.

A second speaker will visit the campus in February. Wendy Cadge is a professor in the Sociology Department at Brandeis University and author of “Paging God,” a text used in the Religion, Spirituality, and Health course.

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